



University of Hawaii at Manoa

Environmental Center
Crawford 317 • 2550 Campus Road
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822
Telephone (808) 948-7361

Office of the Director

PROPOSED BARBERS POINT HARBOR

Statement for the House Interim Subcommittee on the
1995 Honolulu Harbor Master Plan
Public Hearing 25 November 1977

by Doak C. Cox
Director, Environmental Center

Representative Takamura and Members of the Committee. My name is Doak C. Cox. I am Director of the Environmental Center of the University of Hawaii. The functions of the Center include the coordination of environmental services of the University community. Among such services is the review of Environmental Impact Statements such as that which has been produced as required by State law for the proposed Barbers Point Harbor. We have submitted copies of our review of this Environmental Impact Statement, RE:0232 for your use. Since it is lengthy, I will not read the review but merely summarize a few salient points. Before I do so, I should call to your attention the facts: 1) that neither the review nor my remarks reflect an institutional position of the University, and 2) that the Environmental Center does not take sides in questions involving subjective value judgements but attempts to contribute to the objective information on which such judgements should be based. In our reviews of Environmental Impact Statements, we are particularly concerned that all pertinent and available or reasonably produceable objective information be provided.

Our review of the Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed Barbers Point Harbor has led us to question whether, on the basis of information presented, the construction of the Barbers Point Harbor can be considered justified and if so whether the initiation of construction in the immediate future, as planned, can be justified.

Our reasons for questioning the justification for the harbor are of three kinds. First, the actual severity of certain potentially very serious natural hazards has not been determined. Second, the actual severity of certain potentially very serious environmental detriments of the construction and use of the harbor has not been evaluated. Third, certain benefits that the harbor will provide seem exaggerated.

The two potentially most serious hazards are those of tsunamis and surges. The Waterways Experiment Station of the Corps of Engineers has pointed out that the proposed harbor will amplify tsunami waves by resonance. The theoretical amplification factor which they have provided would lead to catastrophic wave

heights in the harbor. The theoretical factor is undoubtedly too high, but studies to estimate more realistic factors have not been performed. Significant tsunamis are rare events, but long-period swells capable of generating harbor surges are common. The Waterways Experiment Station has also called attention to the presence of several surge amplification peaks. Through model study, the Look Laboratory of the University has investigated the direct effects of waves in the harbor; and means for the reduction of these direct effects have been incorporated in the harbor design. The model study did not, however, examine the potential surge problem. Surges in the harbor might be so severe and so common as to interfere seriously with its use.

I will mention only two inadequacies in the analysis of environmental detriments. Both relate to secondary environmental effects.

It is recognized that construction of the harbor will itself entail the loss of a little sugarcane land. The construction of the harbor will also stimulate industrial development in the area, which in turn will stimulate the development of additional housing areas. The EIS claims that the additional housing actually attributable to the harbor will be very small compared with the additional amount that will be provided in the area anyway, and that official plans for the area call for extensive urbanization. There is, however, a limit to which urban development in the vicinity can proceed before the amount of land in sugarcane cultivation decreases below the economic minimum necessary for the continuance of the plantation in the area. The question whether the increment of urbanization in the vicinity attributable to the proposed harbor might cause the collapse of the plantation is not addressed in the EIS.

As the EIS recognizes, unemployment will be reduced with construction of the harbor, and the construction is validly recognized as a stimulus to the construction industry in particular. (No special stress need to be laid on the fact that the federal contribution to the stimulus will be great. It is always politically appealing to spend funds derived from national taxes, even though we help pay those taxes.) The question that is not addressed in the EIS, but should be, is the extent of stimulus to the construction industry that is justified. A stimulated construction industry is a stimulus to growth, and an over-stimulus would undercut the policy of controlled growth that has been adopted in this state.

I will mention only one exaggerated benefit--that is the benefit associated with the more efficient means the harbor would provide for unloading petroleum products. It is based on the assumption that petroleum imports will increase five times in the next 50 years, an assumption that seems highly questionable in the light of the world petroleum resource situation, and the certainly escalating price of petroleum, even if projected increases in the population of Oahu and of the State are valid.

Even if further analysis on these and other questions confirmed the future justification for the construction of the harbor, there remains the question why it is proposed for construction now.

The EIS discusses present inadequacies in Honolulu Harbor, and also plans that have been made to remedy these inadequacies to the extent that Honolulu Harbor will be adequate to meet needs until sometime in the early 1990's. (Incidentally, there is no adequate discussion of the relative costs of further

improvements at Honolulu that would make Honolulu adequate for a longer term vs. the costs of construction of a wholly new port to supplement Honolulu. The construction of the new port, it is estimated, will take five years. It will, therefore, be ready for use 7 to 12 years before it is needed. Statements by shipping concerns quoted in the press indicate they will not split operations between Honolulu and Barbers Point. It appears then, that the new harbor will be unused or at least underutilized for a considerable period. In the meantime, competitive needs for the funds that have been invested in its construction will not have been met.

It appears clear that the final decision to proceed with the construction of the Barbers Point Harbor should not be made until questions such as those to which we have called attention have been answered, unless the community and its official representatives consider the questions unimportant.